

The Table of Grace

In today's gospel reading, Luke describes this scene: Jesus has been invited to a Pharisee's house for dinner and is watching how guests choose seats of honor.

While I was preparing this message, I researched what a Pharisee would be equivalent to today. The descriptors were not flattering—"self-righteous... hypocritical." In fact Jesus, in the book of Matthew, had described the pharisees as being similar to a tomb—beautiful on the outside but hollow on the inside and filled with old bones and filth!

So you may be thinking why was Jesus invited to this gathering? Scripture tells us that he was being watched...

Imagine being invited to a grand banquet. You get there early and see that the best seats are still available. Those are the seats closest to the host and hostess and they are beautifully decorated. Everyone would know by just looking at them that they were indeed the best in the house and the occupants must be very important! By taking one of those seats, you are sure to be a part of the "in" crowd during dinner.

Jesus uses this moment to teach us something deeper than proper etiquette. He's revealing a deeper truth by showing us how to live in God's kingdom—with humility and generosity.

In the passage, Jesus advised guests not to seek the most prestigious seats, as they might be embarrassed should the host ask them to move down so someone more important could have their seat.

Instead, he encouraged them to choose the lowest seat, a seat furthest away from the host. Then, the host might honor them by inviting them closer.

Humility isn't weakness—it's strength guided by grace. It's the quiet confidence that God sees us, even when those around us do not.

Jesus then spoke to the host, urging him not to invite just friends, family, or wealthy neighbors who could repay the favor. Instead, Jesus said he should invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind—those who cannot repay. Such generosity would be rewarded at the resurrection of the righteous.

Applying Jesus' teaching from this passage today involves embracing humility and generosity in everyday life. Here's how we might live out these principles:

1. Practice Humility

- **Avoid seeking recognition or status:** Let your actions speak for themselves rather than striving for attention or praise.
- **Respect others' contributions:** Whether at work, church, or in your community, honor others and give space for their voices.
- **Be open to correction and learning:** Humility means being teachable and not assuming you know everything.

Example: Instead of pushing to lead or speak first, listen actively and support others' ideas. Let leadership or recognition come naturally.

2. Be Generous Without Expecting Anything in Return

- **Help those in need:** Offer assistance through volunteering, donations, or simply offering time and kindness.
- **Build inclusive relationships:** Reach out to those who are often overlooked or marginalized.
- **Give quietly:** Avoid giving for the sake of being seen or praised.

Example: Host a meal or event and invite people who may be lonely, struggling, or new to your community, rather than just close friends or family.

3. Practice Self-Reflection

We should ask ourselves:

- Am I doing this to be seen or to serve?
 - Am I giving with strings attached, or freely?
 - Am I lifting others up or trying to elevate myself?
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4. Trust in God's Reward

Jesus reminds us that true reward comes not from people, but from God. This encourages us to live with eternal values in mind.

He calls us to build a table of grace where everyone is welcome, especially those the world forgets.

In conclusion, Jesus' teachings in today's reading are clear:

- Choose humility over self-promotion.
- Give freely without expecting return.

Micah 6:8 sums it up perfectly – “He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God.

Amen

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God,

Thank You for the wisdom of Your Word and the example of Jesus, who taught us to take the lower seat and to welcome those the world often overlooks. Help us to walk humbly, not seeking honor for ourselves, but lifting others up in love. Teach us to give freely, without expecting anything in return, trusting that You see every act of kindness and will reward what is done in secret.

Lord, open our hearts to those in need. Help us build tables of grace where all are welcome—where the poor, the lonely, the hurting, and the forgotten find a place. May our lives reflect Your Kingdom values of humility, generosity, and compassion.

Empower us this week to live differently—to choose humility over pride, service over status, and love over recognition. May we be known not by what we gain, but by how we give.

In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen